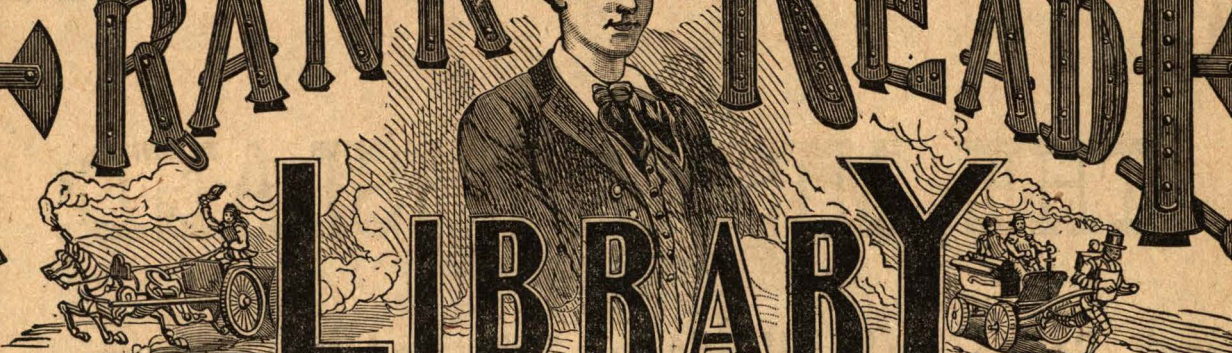


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THE MISSING ISLAND; or, Frank Reade, Jr.'s Wonderful Trip Under the Deep Sea.

By "NONAME."



Harkwell stood behind him with one hand upraised, a knife in his grasp and was just about to sever Frank's life line. It was murder pure and simple that he intended. The young inventor realized this.

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THE MISSING ISLAND;

OR,

Frank Reade, Jr.'s Wonderful Trip Under the Deep Sea.

A WEIRD STORY OF THE OCEAN.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Frank Reade, Jr.'s Search for a Lost Man in His Latest Air Wonder" etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

A NEW PROJECT.

"I WILL admit, Mr. Frank Reade, Jr., that you are a much traveled man, but I think there is one part of the world which you have not visited, and which in fact is seldom thought of by explorers or scientists."

"Indeed, Mr. Denver Gray!" exclaimed the young inventor in surprise. "You interest me greatly. Pray where is that strange locality?"

"It is not far from our own United States."

"Then there must be some formidable barrier to keep away the ubiquitous tourist of these modern times."

"Not the least sort of a one. You can go thither, however, only by boat, as the locality I have reference to is an archipelago of islands just below the Gulf of California."

"Phsaw! that is a well traveled part of the ocean!"

"You are wrong. The archipelago of which I speak is southwest of Mazatlan and out of the beaten track of vessels. It is seldom or never visited by any ship."

"You don't mean it."

"Yes, I do. What is more these islands are inhabited."

"Natives?"

"As true as you live, they are of the old Aztec race and doubtless the only living representatives to-day."

Frank Reade, Jr. the famous inventor was intensely interested.

"That is all very wonderful if true," he declared.

"I hope you will not doubt me," said Gray, reproachfully.

"Certainly not, if you have seen these islands and their Aztec inhabitants with your own eyes."

"I have."

"That settles it."

"As no doubt I have informed you before I have been a rolling stone," said Mr. Denver Gray, lighting a cigar, "I have gathered little moss but lots of experience and heaps of adventure."

"Indeed!"

"How I came to visit the Aztec Archipelago came about in a curious fashion. I was in California during the gold fever. Going into the mines I made a snug fortune and thought I would return via Cape Horn to New York."

"So I embarked on a merchant brig—the Esther. Off Cape San Lucas we struck a typhoon and were blown for a day or more whither we knew not. But the vessel finally came up on a reef."

"The next day when the storm had subsided, there we were high and dry. About us were a number of very beautiful tropical islands."

"This beauty for verdure I have never seen surpassed. We managed to get out a boat, and went ashore."

"But no sooner had we struck the beach than we were surrounded by half a hundred barbarous, looking wretches clad half in armor and rich silken stuffs. They were genuine types of Aztecs."

"That is more than wonderful!" said Frank Reade, Jr., "for it has long been the current belief that the Aztecs are an extinct race."

"I have no reason to doubt that these are the only living types."

"If yet alive!"

"And why should they not be? They were quite a powerful tribe,

being several thousand strong, and having a number of walled towns on the isle."

"It is very strange that there is no scientific account of these people, as they can be but a few hundred miles from the mainland."

"Ah! I must tell you about that. You well know that the Aztecs were never a maritime or seafaring people. All the boats they ventured to use were small crafts, such as pirogues or light canoes, in which they traveled from one isle to another, but never to the mainland."

"Ah! I see!"

"Now to resume my narrative. We were welcomed quite warmly by the Aztecs at first. We were nine in number—all seamen but myself."

"We were taken to their walled city and there treated to mescal and maize cakes, which were excellent. For several weeks we hobnobbed with these curious people."

"Then one day a great change came. One of their high priests took it into his head that we had been long enough in high esteem of the people, and fearful that they would accept us as gods, to the damage of his idols, he resolved to put us where we could do no harm."

"The way he proceeded to turn the people against us was unique. He built great feast fires upon the temple wall and claimed that his god, Quetzal, came to him in the smoke and demanded the white men as sacrifices."

"This settled our fate at once. We were seized and thrown into dungeons. Of all the crew of the Esther, Dick Harkwell, the mate, and myself, were the only ones to escape."

"Each day one of the prisoners was taken out and sacrificed until only Dick and I remained. It looked black for us, but we made a desperate effort to escape and succeeded."

"That night we broke our dungeon bars and cut sticks for the shore. Finding a pirogue, we got into it and put to sea. We were picked up two days later in a dead calm by a schooner and brought to Santiago, Chili. Thence we made our way home."

Gray blew a few wreaths of smoke from his cigar and continued:

"I have thought many times that I would revisit the Aztec Islands again, and in condition to treat with those misguided barbarians in a safe manner. I think such a visit could be made profitable from a trading point of view, for they have plenty of gold and jewels which they might exchange for our merchandise."

Frank Reade, Jr., drew a deep breath and regarded his friend with interest for some moments.

Then he said:

"Gray, you spoke the truth when you said that there was one part of the world which I had never visited. I surely never dreamed of the existence of such islands as those."

Gray smiled at this.

"There are few who know of their existence. Indeed, I think Dick Harkwell and I—"

"Who is Harkwell?"

"He was the mate of the Esther. At present he is in Baltimore and awaiting word from me to start at once upon a visit to the Aztecs."

"How do you propose to make this visit?" asked Frank.

Gray looked intently at the young inventor for a moment and then said:

"First answer a question of mine."

"Well?"

"I understand that you have just completed a submarine boat and that with it you intend to take a trip to some distant and unexplored part of the world."

Frank nodded his head.

"I have just finished the Nautilus," he said, "and with it I believe that I can penetrate to almost any submarine depth."

"Wonderful!"

"And it is true that I intend to take a submarine trip with her."

"Not content with sailing the air in your wonderful air-ship, you now propose to descend to ocean depths."

"Exactly."

"Have you decided to what part of the world you will go?"

"No."

"Have you any mission to perform?"

"None."

"Then," exclaimed Gray, eagerly, "why not go with me upon a voyage to the Aztec Islands?"

Frank was silent a moment.

Then he said:

"That looks like a capital idea, but—"

"What?"

"Why need a submarine boat be employed? Why will not something else do just as well? A ship for instance."

"Ah, but wait until I have explained," declared Gray. "There is an ample and wonderful field for submarine work. Know that the whole bed of the ocean between the Aztec Isles and the mainland was once above the water and peopled with a powerful race. There remain yet buried under hundreds of fathoms by some mighty revulsion their cities and towns. Why not explore them?"

Frank brought his hand down forcibly upon the table.

"I will do it!" he cried.

Gray gave a cry of joy.

"Then I have gained the object of my visit here to-day!" he said.

"What?" exclaimed Frank. "Was it this that brought you here to see me?"

"Yes!" replied Gray. "I read in the newspapers that you had just finished your submarine boat. It occurred to me that if I could enlist you in my scheme success would be certain. So I came on to Readestown at once to see you. I will now telegraph my friend Harkwell of my success."

"Wait!" said Frank, putting a hand upon his arm. "Would you not like to see the new boat?"

"Very much indeed!"

"Then come with me."

Frank opened the door and Denver Gray followed him.

They were now in the office of the great machine works in Readestown, where Frank Reade, Jr., manufactured his machines.

It is hardly necessary to explain to the reader that Readestown was the home of the ancestors of the famous inventor, whose father was famous before him, and that it was a smart, driving little city.

Denver Gray followed Frank out into the high walled yard, and approached an inner gate.

A diminutive darky appeared, with a comical grin which showed a gleaming double row of ivories.

"Open the gate, Pomp," said Frank, authoritatively. "Where is Barney?"

"Dat 'ish loafah am in de nex' yard, sah," replied the negro, readily. "He am jes' waitin' fo' yo' to come along and put him to wo'k, sah."

"All right," laughed Frank; "we'll fix him."

Then they passed through the gate.

CHAPTER II.

THE NAUTILUS.

ONE might as well have attempted to profane the sanctity of the Holy of Holies in a Hindoo mosque as to gain admission without a card from Frank Reade, Jr., to the inner works of the Reade machine shop.

Pomp the faithful negro was sure to be on guard at the outer gate. While in the inner yard one would certainly encounter Barney O'Shea, a shock-headed, comical-mugged son of Erin's Isle.

These two servants of the young inventor had long been in his employ and accompanied him wherever he went upon his travels.

They were jolly as could be, and faithful to their duties.

Pomp was a capital cook and man of all work, and Barney was a skilled electrician.

They were mutually the warmest of friends but proverbially fond of nagging each other.

As Frank passed into the inner yard with his guest there was Barney all in readiness.

"Begorra, Misther Frank, an' did yer cum in here widout iver findin' that careless naygur at his post?" cried Barney.

"Oh, no, Barney," replied Frank. "Pomp was on hand and seemed alarmed lest you would not be."

Barney scowled.

"Bad cess to his black shkin for thryin' to give me a bad name to yez!" he growled. "The first toime I git behoindt his back may the devil sphare him fer I won't."

Frank and Gray laughed.

"Evidently they are a little out with each other," said Gray.

"Pshaw! that is only their way of joking," said Frank. "Well, let us go on."

Barney opened the inner door and Gray beheld a surprising sight. Here within high brick walls was a mighty and deep basin of water.

In it floated the new triumph of the inventor's brain, the submarine boat, the Nautilus.

Truly it was a wonderful craft to look upon.

Frank stood upon the plank landing and pointed out its many excellent lines above the water.

In outline it resembled much one of the famous racing yachts save that it was broader abeam.

Above the water line and guarding the deck was a hand rail extending fore and aft.

The cabin was long and half cylindrical in shape as seen above the deck. In it were glass windows and dead eyes.

The material of the yacht, as Frank explained, was all of tough but thinly rolled steel.

Aft was the huge pneumatic reservoir of water which regulated the rising or descent of the boat.

Above the cabin was a small hurricane deck inclosed in heaviest plate glass and wire netting. Forward of this was the pilot-house.

And in this was a powerful submarine electric search-light capable of dispelling the darkness of the ocean depths for fully half a mile.

Practically this was the sum total of the outward interesting features of the Nautilus.

"Now we will go aboard!" said Frank.

A plank shot out and the visitors walked aboard the submarine craft. They passed through two hermetical doors and a vestibule arranged with a number of air valves which will be described in full later.

Into the cabin of the Nautilus the two men passed.

Frank touched a spring and it was instantly dazzlingly ablaze with electric light.

"What can beat this?" he asked.

Gray gazed a moment spellbound and then said:

"Nothing on earth!"

Truly the cabin was a picture of rare luxury and costliness. The furnishings and drapings were fit for a palace.

Into the state rooms they next went. These were elegantly fitted up.

Then came the gun-room and the scientific room. The electrical engine room where the motive power of the boat was obtained.

It was driven by twin screws operated by electric engines. The tank which regulated the rising and sinking of the boat worked by pneumatic pressure.

When water filled the tank the boat sank. When it was expelled by pneumatic pressure the boat would rise.

Then the cook's galley was visited. Here Pomp concocted the daintiest and most appetizing of dishes.

There were many other wonderful things witnessed by Gray which will be called to the attention of the reader later in the story.

Gray said but little until after the entire round of the boat had been made.

Then he said:

"Only one point is unexplained to me, Frank!"

"What is that?" asked the young inventor.

"When under water, where do you get all the air necessary to sustain life and keep this pneumatic machinery in trim?"

"I will explain that easily!" said Frank, with a laugh.

"Do you see these small tubes which occur at intervals of a few feet all along the cabin wall?"

"Yes."

"Well, those are governed by valves connected with an immense chemical air generator in the hold. As fast as the pure air is manufactured the gases are attracted and destroyed, so that, while living under water, we are breathing the purest of air."

This settled all doubt in Gray's mind.

A few moments later they had left the boat and were again in the yard.

"How soon shall we start, Frank?" he asked.

"I am ready now."

"So am I."

"Then let us put it Thursday of this week."

"It shall be so. I will go at once and telegraph Harkwell."

"Then our crew will consist of five?"

"Yes."

"Very good! Be sure and be on hand Thursday."

"I will do so."

That night the train took Gray out of Readestown on his way to Baltimore.

In due time he reached that city and went at once to a hotel.

Then he called a messenger and sent him out after Richard Harkwell.

Gray had not long to wait.

The door opened and the first mate of the Esther stood before him. In personal appearance Harkwell was by no means prepossessing.

He was tall and brawny, with a dark, scowling cast of features.

He barely nodded as he entered.

"Well, Dick," said Gray gaily, "I have made the hit."

"What hit?" asked the other tersely.

"Why, I have seen Frank Reade, Jr., and his submarine boat, and have enlisted them both."

"Oh, you have!" said Harkwell with some show of interest.

"When are we going to start?"

"Thursday of this week."

"All right," and the mate's eyes glistened greedily. "There ought to be a big fortune for us out there, Gray, if we can kill off all those Aztecs and get their gold."

"Kill them off?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"Why, aren't you stupid! How can we get their gold if not?"

"Why, barter for it," said Gray.

Harkwell laughed coarsely.

"Mighty little I'll barter," he declared, "but we'll settle that later. There's only one bad feature in taking this man Reade along."

"One bad feature?"

"Yes."

"For mercy's sake, what is that?"

"We'll have to divide with him and his gang."

Gray looked at his companion hard. This sentiment of utter selfishness sickened him.

"For mercy's sake, what has come over you, Harkwell?" he exclaimed in surprise. "I can't make you out."

"Can't you?" laughed the other, coarsely. "Well, don't try. But never mind. We'll wait until we get the gold first. I'll be on hand Thursday."

After Harkwell had gone Gray spent some time in reverie.

"That Harkwell is a queer fellow!" he muttered. "I almost wish he was not going after all."

The news of Frank Reade, Jr.'s projected trip leaked out and speedily traveled from one end of the country to the other.

Everybody was at once interested and accounts were eagerly waited for.

Of course such a thing as a trip in the Pacific in a submarine boat was quite an unusual thing, and must needs attract attention.

Meanwhile Denver Gray made all preparations for the voyage which he deemed necessary.

Harkwell became more congenial and seemed to enter somewhat more kindly into the scheme.

Nobody could be more confident than Gray that a fortune might be reaped in the Aztec Islands.

"I tell you it is there!" he declared; "to open up a profitable trade with those islands is to establish a sure highway to great wealth."

But Harkwell only smiled evilly, and said:

"Pshaw! that is all folly when you can have all that same wealth for the simple taking of it."

"I certainly should not lend myself to such an act of piracy!" declared Gray, "and I don't believe Frank Reade, Jr. would either!"

But Harkwell only smiled in a sinister way.

At length the day set apart for the start came.

It proved to be a propitious one and a large crowd were present to witness the departure of the submarine boat.

Frank Reade, Jr. met Gray and Harkwell at the train and conducted them to his house.

There a rich dinner was partaken of and then all repaired to the yard where was the boat.

A loud cheer greeted Frank as he drove through the streets of Readestown.

"Our project claims the interest of the majority of the people in this country!" cried Gray, "and I hope it will succeed!"

"So do I," declared Frank.

But Harkwell's eyes gleamed and he smiled in a strange way.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE WAY.

No doubt the reader is wondering how the start was to be made from the machine works in the submarine boat. A word of explanation.

Of course, the Nautilus could not proceed without water, and of that there was plenty, however.

The immense tank in which she rested was connected with a deep canal and a series of locks, which led down to the river.

From thence the river was navigable to the sea.

So when the voyagers had gone aboard the Nautilus, and all was in readiness, the gate to the canal was opened.

The water rushed into the lock, and the Nautilus entered.

Soon she was in the canal, and later shot into the river.

Thousands of people lined the river banks, and cheered her. The voyagers all appeared on the deck, and waved their caps in recognition.

The Nautilus glided along through the water as buoyant as a canoe. Frank saw that the people observed this, but that they were not satisfied.

They wanted to see the boat operated, and he said:

"Into the cabin all of you. I want to prove to those people that the Nautilus is indeed a submarine boat."

All rushed into the cabin.

Frank stepped into the pilot house and pressed the spring. Every door and window was instantly sealed hermetically.

Then the young inventor turned on the electric switch which set every electric lamp aglow.

Next he pressed the lever of the water tank, and instantly the boat began to sink.

Down she went gracefully to the bed of the river.

The depth was not great, scarcely more than forty feet, but there she rested for some time upon the muddy bottom.

Then Frank raised her and sent her forward through the water at a distance half way between the bottom and the surface.

She moved as easily as if upon the surface, and with all the grace of a fish.

The voyagers felt no jar and experienced no inconvenience. It was a most novel and agreeable sensation.

"By Jove, this is delightful!" declared Denver Gray. "I enjoy this immensely! Is it not grand?"

"Golly! de Nautilus am jus' a dandy an' no mistake!" declared Pomp.

"Begorra, yer roight fer wanst in yer loife!" cried Barney.

"Huh! don't yo' be so flip, I'ish!" spluttered Pomp.

But Harkwell was silent. He had occupied himself in stealthily studying the mechanism of the boat.

It was his purpose if possible to gain admittance to the engine room and examine the machinery.

He was a machinist by trade himself, and therefore was more than ordinarily interested.

Frank let the Nautilus run ahead for a few hundred yards. Then he sent her to the surface.

As she came up like a duck from the dripping depths the crowd on the banks of the river saw her.

They saw at once that she was a logical triumph and nothing less than what was claimed for her, a submarine boat.

So they made the welkin ring with their hearty cheers. The Nautilus thus had an enthusiastic send off.

Frank now delayed no further.

He started the engines at full speed, and the Nautilus shot forward down the swift current.

She was on her way to the sea.

The great journey was begun.

What its outcome was to be only time could tell. One thing was certain and this was that the voyagers dreamed little of what was in store for them.

Adventures wild and thrilling, hardship and privation, and many strange sights were to be theirs.

The start, however, was made in the most joyful of spirits.

In due time the ocean was reached, and plowing the waters of the Atlantic the little submarine boat took a southward course.

Of course there was no other way but to round Cape Horn.

The Nautilus, however, was a fast traveler and left the miles rapidly behind her.

Frank had decided to keep on the surface the most of the way. As yet there was no reason for descending to the lower depths.

The Nautilus could travel faster above than below water of course.

At night the search-light lit up the sea for two miles ahead and warned all vessels from her course.

There was something charming in the voyage upon the Nautilus.

The smart little craft made rapid headway and the heavy seas did not interfere.

But there were days while crossing the Equator that the sea was like a mirror and the moon hung like a silver globe in the blue ether.

Then all lingered upon deck until long past midnight.

Barney was a rich baritone singer and also played an Irish fiddle. He was familiar with legions of quaint melodies of Erin's isle.

And Pomp contributed his share to the entertainment fund.

The ducky was a rich tenor singer and played the banjo as few can.

He sang plantation melodies galore and danced in the approved breakdown style.

So that altogether the first part of the trip of the Nautilus was as jolly and smooth as could be wished for.

But after Cape Horn seas had been buffeted and they were well into the South Pacific, one day Barney, who was in the pilot house, gave a great cry of alarm.

"Ach, Mither Frank, wud yez cum here, sor!"

The young inventor detected the note of alarm in Barney's voice, and rushing to the pilot house, saw the Celt hanging to the wheel with pallid face.

"What's the matter, Barney?" asked the young inventor, sharply.

"Oh, sor, wud yez luk at the loikes av that!"

Frank looked in the direction indicated which was to the horizon line, and saw that the Celt's fears were not without foundation.

Above all was a clear and cloudless sky.

But low upon the horizon was a long yellow cloud below which was a line of what looked like white frost.

Upward toward the zenith, the yellow cloud was speeding rapidly.

The young inventor was by no means so unfamiliar with signs of those latitudes that he did not know what this meant.

He knew well enough that a storm of most savage character was rapidly coming.

The typhoon of the South Pacific it was which threatened them. But at the sight Frank only smiled.

"Pshaw!" he said, "is that what you are turning pale for, Barney?"

"Share, Mither Frank, an' it's afther being a dreadful sthorm."

"Yes, but it cannot hurt us!"

"Not so, sor?"

"Why of course not. We have only to let the boat sink to the bottom. Not the slightest effect of the storm can be felt there!"

The Celt looked foolish.

"I niver thought av that, sor!" he declared. "Shure it was very funny indace. But I thought I wud call yure attintion—"

"Which was right?" said Frank. "We will be on our guard. But what is that to the eastward?"

"Shure, sor, it luks loike a white sail!"

"A sail!" exclaimed Frank; "that ship is in deadly peril unless she gets under bare poles at once!"

The vessel, however, seemed to stand up to the wind with all canvas spread. As yet no effort had been made to take it in.

Frank continued to watch the strange vessel with alarm.

"Mercy on us!" he exclaimed. "Why don't they see their danger?"

"It must be, sor, that they niver saw a sthorm av the koind afore!" ventured Barney.

"It may be so, but it hardly seems possible!" declared Frank; "if not I think we ought to warn them!"

"Something ought to be done, Frank!" cried Denver Gray. "They evidently are blind to the awful peril!"

"Then let us go over and give them warning," declared Frank.

Barney quickly set the course of the submarine boat.

Across the white-capped waves she sped.

The strange ship did not make a move to change her canvas, in spite of the fact that the storm was close at hand.

Higher into the zenith the yellow clouds were ranging.

"What can they be thinking of?" cried Gray feverishly. "They are all doomed! They can never take in all that sail now!"

"She will go to the bottom."

"So I think!"

"But we can do no more than warn the witless crew."

But now a very curious state of affairs was discovered.

The Nautilus had made a lightning like run and was almost within hailing distance of the strange ship.

But not a human being was seen in the shrouds, at the rail, or even upon the deck.

Astonished, the voyagers gazed at the ship.

She was a noble brig, and stood up before the wind boldly. Every sail was spread, and she was making a clear course through the water.

But nobody could be seen at the wheel, which appeared to be lashed.

"That is more than queer," muttered Gray. "Where are her crew? Can they be all asleep?"

"If so, it is time to wake them up," cried Frank Reade, Jr. "Run the Nautilus alongside, Barney."

The Celt proceeded to obey.

The ship had been hailed repeatedly, but no answer had been returned. It seemed most queer, and Frank was resolved to solve the mystery.

There was but one way to do this, and he accepted it.

As the Nautilus ran alongside Frank grasped a swinging rope, and went up over the rail and aboard the mysterious ship.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PLAGUE SHIP.

As Frank went over the rail he was followed by Gray.

Together they stood upon the deck of the strange ship. One moment they hesitated, both impressed with the same peculiar sensation.

There was a certain unearthly stillness, a sense of utter desertion aboard the vessel that one experienced an uncanny feeling.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Gray, "the vessel can't be abandoned, can it, Frank? There don't seem to be anybody aboard."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the young inventor. "Don't you see the sails are all set? They must be in the cabin."

Then Frank lifted his voice and shouted vociferously.

"Ahoy, the ship!"

Again and again he repeated the hail, but no answer came—no blue jacket crew came rushing from the forecabin—no officer came from the cabin.

Astounded, the young inventor took a stride aft.

This brought him in view of the wheel, and there at its foot he saw the form of a man recumbent.

"Asleep!" he gasped. "Well, he must be a sound sleeper!"

He moved forward with the impulse to rouse him. But as he did so, he involuntarily drew back again.

"My God!" he gasped, "he is dead!"

"Dead!" ejaculated Gray.

There was no doubt of this. The man's swollen features and sallow hue, with the vacant eyeballs, showed that he was truly dead.

What was more, upon his face were strange pustules, evidence of the true cause of death.

"Heavens!" gasped Frank, "it is small pox!"

Both men recoiled.

"Are you not afraid of the contagion?" asked Gray. "I am not. I have been exposed to it before!"

"I fear it not!" said Frank. "Let us see if any other poor souls are on board, and if any are alive!"

So both turned toward the cabin. At the gangplank they halted.

An unbearable odor came from below. It was terrible to think of entering that cabin.

"A veritable plague ship!" gasped Gray. "We risk our lives in staying here, Frank!"

"Can it be that that poor fellow at the wheel was the only survivor and that all have been wiped out of existence?" exclaimed Frank.

"I believe that is the truth," declared Gray, "and I wouldn't go down into that cabin."

"But what if some poor soul is down there who needs help?"

"If so, then he will answer us. Shout down to him."

Frank complied with this. But no answer came back.

The young inventor hesitated but a moment and then descended the stairs. It was risking infection, but he did not think of that.

Down he went and stood beneath the skylights.

There was the cabin table, and upon it was an open book. A legible hand had traced an entry upon the page.

Thus it read:

"To-day Page, the mate, died of the terrible plague. He is the last save me. Only yesterday we threw the body of Captain Clark overboard to join the rest of the crew of twenty one who have all perished by this dread disease."

"God alone knows what my chances are. Hour by hour I feel the awful sickness enchain me and I am powerless to resist it. At least I will remain above the deck and at the wheel. Strange that we meet no friendly sail. God rest the poor souls who have fallen a victim to this awful pestilence. Our Father help me in my extremity. I see only death before me. But let it come. My nerves shall be steel, and I will die as a brave man should. Farewell."

Frank read this aloud. Gray was now by his side.

"Horrible!" groaned the explorer. "What a dreadful fate."

A few steps further upon a couch lay the corpse of the mate. The two adventurers turned and fled up the stairway.

In the open air they revived.

"Mercy on us!" gasped Gray. "I thought I should faint. Eh, Frank?"

"The same," replied the young inventor. "It is the most dreadful case I ever heard of."

"And this ship—"

"Must go to her doom, for there is no crew to sail her!"

"It seems a pity!"

"And yet—how could the pestilence ever be driven from her? Who would come aboard her now and steer her to a port of safety and risk the plague? Of what value is the cargo?"

"True!" agreed Gray, "but—Heaven help us! Look at that, Frank!"

The yellow cloud had passed the zenith and overspread the sky by two-thirds.

The air was growing strangely dark, and the distant thunder of the storm came booming over the heaving sea.

Far away a wall of white was seen racing across the ocean. It was the dreaded tidal wave.

"Let us get out of here as quickly as possible!" cried Gray. "We have no time to lose. If that wave overtakes us we are lost!"

"Right!" cried Frank; "back to the Nautilus!"

Back to the deck of the submarine boat they sprang. Into the cabin they rushed.

Frank's first move was to enter the medicinal closet where he kept a sulphuric disinfectant.

This both he and Gray indulged in liberally, both externally and internally. It was a positive safeguard.

Meanwhile, Pomp had cast loose from the plague ship which was now half a mile astern.

The tempest was likely to strike it first, so when Frank came up into the pilot-house he took the wheel and said:

"If possible I want to see how that ship will take the storm."

"That is right," said Gray, eagerly. "Alas I fear she will go down."

Harkwell stood near watching the scene silently. He made no comment.

Suddenly a cloud seemed to swoop down upon the brig.

One moment she bent before it, then, louder than the blast, came a report like a cannon.

Her mainmast was swept by the quarter. With it went the fore, and the hulk, whirling about, was also stripped of the mizzen.

High up in the arms of the storm the dismantled ship was carried for one moment and then was lost to sight.

Then, and not a moment too soon, Frank pressed the electric key.

An immense wave rolled over the Nautilus. Had she been other than a submarine boat, that moment would have been her last.

But that wave had little effect upon her save to jar her somewhat. A moment more and she was under the waves and safe from harm.

Down she went until the motion of the storm could be felt no longer.

Then Frank set the course to the northward and ran on under the sea.

While the awful storm was raging above, the Nautilus was making good headway.

Below in plain sight was the bed of the ocean.

And many wonderful sights were there revealed. As Gray and Harkwell were novices they occupied their time in studying them.

Great forests of submarine plants floated beneath, among the branches of which strange fish lurked.

There were coral caves and grottoes, plains of white sand, deep valleys and mountains, and all sorts of sea monsters.

Occasionally some one of these would follow the boat, and even come up to the plate glass windows and appear to be looking in upon the occupants in curiosity.

Sharks frequently followed the Nautilus for a long way, and one day one of them ventured to attack the boat.

He made a tremendous whirl under the Nautilus and charged upward.

There was a shock as its heavy jaws struck the steel keel of the boat. But no harm was done and Mr. Shark did not repeat the attack.

There was no doubt but that his jaw had suffered, for blood was seen in the water and he drifted far astern.

The closest shave the Nautilus experienced was when it ran plump into the arms of a tremendous cuttlefish.

This monster had arms fully forty feet in length and at once enfolded the bow of the boat.

That it might have done serious harm was certain had not Frank Reade, Jr. acted promptly.

Pomp was at the wheel at the time and yelled:

"Golly fo' glory, Marse Frank. We am done cotched fo' shuah. Cum as fas' as yo' kin!"

Frank was instantly at the wheel. He acted quickly.

Drawing the boat back as far as possible he put on all power of the engines and rammed the cyclops of the deep.

The ram cleft the monster's head and evidently reached a vital part for it succumbed.

Again the boat was running at full speed one day, when Barney suddenly saw what looked like tons of rock falling from above.

He instantly reversed the engines and yelled for Frank. The young inventor instantly saw what was the matter.

The rocks above were not falling but absolutely stationary, being nothing more nor less than the roof of a submarine cavern in which they had run.

"By Jupiter!" exclaimed Gray as this announcement was made. "We don't want to get too deep into this place, or we'll never find our way out."

"You are right!" agreed Frank, "it is a literal mammoth cave of the deep sea!"

But they had no trouble in finding their way out of the place.

Still northward the Nautilus kept, until one day Frank pulled out his charts, and he and Gray began to study them.

"We ought to be not far from the Aztec Isles now!" declared Gray, "but they are not on this chart."

CHAPTER V.

THE AZTEC ISLES.

"Nor on any other," replied Frank. "It is very strange that they have never been charted."

"On the contrary, it is not at all to be wondered at," declared Gray.

"And why?"

"For the fact that they are wholly out of the course of any line of vessels. It is not one vessel in ten thousand would cruise in those waters and stumble upon them."

"And why not pray?"

"For the reason that nothing ever draws vessels into that part of the ocean. They go all around it."

"That is very odd," declared Frank. "However, I will not dispute you. But I am very anxious to see those isles."

"And see them you shall," declared Gray.

"You are confident we will find them?"

"Certainly."

"All right!" said Frank, with a laugh; "it will be verifying a literal fairy story."

Then they went on deck. Gray had a glass and kept scanning the horizon.

"We ought to be nearly in sight of them," he declared, "but there is a slight haze. Ah!"

He brought his glass to a focus, studied the horizon a moment and then shouted:

"Two points to starboard, Barney, and then dead ahead."

Frank was instantly by his side.

"Then you have sighted them?" he asked.

"Yes. Take a squint just off the bow there. Follow the sea up to the line. What do you see?"

"Land."

"Right! You will soon behold the wonderful islands."

All the voyagers were in a state of the most intense excitement now. They all crowded the rail.

Watch was kept of the rapidly growing coast line.

As they drew nearer several detached islands of the small archipelago were seen.

But Gray pointed to the largest and central one, saying:

"That is the inhabited island. The others, according to the Aztecs, are all in possession of the Fire God, who will some day relegate them to the bottom of the sea."

The Nautilus was now making marvelous speed in calm water.

Every moment the Aztec Island grew plainer to view.

Then suddenly a little harbor was seen which Gray pointed to and cried:

"Make anchorage in there! It is a safe harbor!"

Numberless small boats were seen upon the limpid waters of the bay as the Nautilus glided in.

The appearance of the submarine boat seemed to act as a magnet to these.

They instantly in a great body flocked toward her.

"How is it?" asked Frank. "Are we safe to allow these fellows to come near us?"

"They cannot harm us while on the water," declared Gray. "It is only on land that we need fear them."

"But where is all the gold you've told about!" sneered Harkwell. "I expected to find the beach paved with it."

"You had no right to expect such a thing," replied Gray tartly; "but the gold is not the only consideration of this trip."

"That is evident," sneered Harkwell.

Quite a number of the native canoes were now within speaking distance.

Their occupants were genuine types of Aztecs, as Gray had declared. It was like stepping back into the ancient history of the day of Cortes and the Spanish Invasion.

"Let me see if I can speak a few words to them," said Gray. "I used to know a little of the Aztec tongue."

So Gray hailed a number of the boats which drew nearer. Then he carried on a broken conversation with them.

From them he learned that no white man had visited the island since his leave taking some years previous.

The Aztecs appeared to be very friendly, and while Gray was conversing a large pirogue put out from the shore and rowed quite close to the Nautilus.

Beneath a silken awning sat a richly-robed heathen, who seemed greatly interested in the new visitors.

A salute was exchanged, and then a spokesman in the bow of the pirogue hailed the Nautilus.

Gray answered him.

The explorer had but a scant knowledge of the Aztec tongue.

But as he said he had been long enough upon the islands to acquire a smattering which was of great service now.

After exchanging words with the Aztec spokesman for some time, Gray turned to Frank and said:

"Here is the best of luck. The old king is dead, and he is succeeded by this young Prince Hualpi. He expresses himself in a friendly way, and assures us that we are welcome to Matatlan, which is the name of the kingdom."

"That is good news!" declared Frank. "Let us make the best of it."

"We will make friends with these people?"

"Certainly!"

"And go ashore also. Of course there will be some risk. But so long as we keep on the right side of the priests I think we will be safe."

"Let us try it."

"All right."

So Gray replied to the Aztec spokesman to this effect:

"We accept of the hospitality of your great ruler and will visit your kingdom. We extend you in return an invitation to come aboard our boat."

To the surprise of all the Prince of Matatlan accepted this invitation.

His pirogue was brought alongside the Nautilus.

Then with a nimble leap he was on the deck. He extended both hands to Frank and Gray and bowed low to the deck.

Then he made a signal to the sun, and said something in the Aztec language which Gray was barely able to interpret.

"He says, I think, that we are his brothers forever, and the Seal of the Holy Sun is upon us," said Gray.

"Good enough!" replied Frank. "Say any good thing in return that you please."

Gray smiled at this carte blanche, but said:

"Great Prince of the Sun, you are our brother, and we have come from over the great sea to pay you our homage. We shall be friends eternal."

Prince Hualpi was immensely pleased with this statement and at once relaxed his dignity, became very affable, and chattering like a magpie.

Two of his attendants walked closely behind him.

Frank threw open the door of the cabin and all entered.

The prince stood a moment as if spellbound.

Evidently the beautiful furnishings of the cabin were a revelation to him.

He acted like one in a dream.

Very courteously Frank and Gray proceeded to show him over the Nautilus.

From one cabin to another they went, Prince Hualpi still speechless until the engine room was reached.

Here the electric machinery completely bewildered him.

It was utterly useless to attempt to logically explain this to him.

He passed a hand across his brow, and shook his head slowly. It was all a puzzle.

Then Frank winked to Gray.

The latter looked out, and saw that the pirogue had retired some yards from the Nautilus.

The latter's deck was clear, and Frank said sharply to Barney.

"Press key 42, and reverse lever No. 10."

"All right, sir!"

The Celt quickly obeyed.

Key 42 hermetically sealed the doors and windows. Lever No. 10 was the tank lever.

Instantly the boat sank. Down below the surface it went.

Then there was a brief transition, and electric lights glared brightly on the scene.

A cry of momentary alarm escaped Prince Hualpi, and his attendants closed about him, and drew their daggers.

But Gray spoke words of reassurance in the Matatlan tongue, and the fears of the heathens subsided.

"There is no danger!" he cried. "Our boat only goes under water just as well as above."

Prince Hualpi was dazed.

"I am dreaming!" he declared. "You are not human beings after all, but gods come out of the west. Then you know Quetzal the God of Love?"

"You are wrong," disclaimed Gray. "We are not gods. All this you see is easily explained and due to natural causes."

It was difficult to convey this idea to the prince in the Matatlan tongue.

But Gray succeeded very well, though Hualpi was not convinced.

Now that his superstitious mind was assured that he was in the hands of men allied to the gods he felt safe.

He looked out upon the bed of the ocean and saw the wonders of the search-light all in a rational manner.

Then he flung himself at Frank Reade, Jr.'s feet and kissed the cabin floor.

"I worship you for you are a god!" he declared; "the mighty god of the sea."

It was no use to try to disabuse the monarch's mind of this impression. Gray saw this at once, so he said to Frank:

"Let it go at that. If they want to think us gods let them. It will give us added power over them!"

"Unless it raises trouble with their priests," said Frank.

"We must trust to luck for that."

For some while the Nautilus remained under the water. Prince Hualpi was charmed.

Then it was announced that they would go again to the surface. Hualpi nodded his head in a pleased manner.

Accordingly Barney was about to open the tank lever, when a startling cry arrested him.

Down upon the deck of the Nautilus came a number of naked forms. They were Aztec divers, who believing that their monarch was sunk forever when the Nautilus went down, had dived to this tremendous depth to see about it.

It was a wonderful feat.

One instant they were able to remain. Then their bodies were seen shooting upward through the limpid waters.

CHAPTER VI.

A GRAND RECEPTION.

The Nautilus was now sent quickly to the surface.

Indeed, it got there almost as quickly as the divers, and one of them was lifted up on the deck.

The little harbor was literally filled with small boats which had flocked to the spot.

The reappearance of the Nautilus was an astounding thing to the Aztecs, but when the cabin door opened and their prince stepped out to view safe and sound, they yelled like veritable fiends with joy.

Prince Hualpi was loath to leave his new god-like acquaintances and insisted that they should visit his palace.

"You are the guests of Matatlan," he declared. "All the country shall pay you worship."

"What shall we do?" asked Gray. "Shall we visit the Aztec city?"

"By all means," agreed Frank.

So the intention was revealed to Prince Hualpi, who called a boatman from the crowd and gave him orders.

Then he pointed to the high mountain peak near this part of the bay and said:

"Yonder is Matatlan. He will guide you to my palace."

Then the pirogue was rowed rapidly away. The boatman stood upon the deck of the Nautilus.

From him Gray managed to learn that upon the other side of the mountain was a great inland sea.

It was upon the shores of this, at the base of the mountain, that the Aztec city was located.

There was a narrow passage between high cliffs which connected this with the bay and the ocean.

Through this passage the submarine boat must proceed.

The entrance to this passage could not at once be seen.

But the boatman indicated with his hand the direction to take, and the Nautilus glided forward.

Soon they were between high walls of basalt, which rose for hundreds of feet upon either side.

Through this for nearly a mile they slowly made their way.

Behind them the passage was literally choked with the boats of the excited and curious people.

But after a time the mountain wall lowered, the passage broadened and the inland sea was seen.

This made the Aztec Isle almost an atoll, and Gray gazed upon the scene in literal surprise.

"Why, that is odd!" he declared; "this was not so. When I was here it was a vast plain!"

To make sure he asked the boatman, who smiled and replied:

"Our priests refused to sacrifice to the Sea God, and he made the plain sink. Many towns lie buried there."

Frank looked interested.

Gray turned and said:

"There—what did I tell you! Here is a chance for a submarine exploration."

"And a good one," agreed Frank; "there is good work ahead for us."

"I believe it."

The Nautilus now floated in the inland sea. To the east was a low level expanse of plain extending to the base of the mountain.

Upon this was the Aztec city.

It presented an interesting and picturesque appearance to the voyagers. They regarded it with interest.

The buildings were all of immense size and a peculiar style of architecture, which in itself was grand.

They were built of stone and a composite like brick. The streets, however, were angular and narrow.

As horses and carriages were unknown among these people, this could easily be understood.

But into the waters of the lake or inland sea, there were built magnificent quays.

Here were legions of picturesque boats and canoes.

A great throng of people were upon the quays as the Nautilus drew nearer.

The submarine boat came up to the very verge of these landings of stone and anchored.

Then a gang ladder was put out and Frank said:

"Barney and Pomp, you may remain aboard until we return. Keep a weather eye open. Come my friends, let us pay our visit to Hualpi now."

Gray and Harkwell were ready.

The latter was now much more agreeable, and seemed even quite in a pleasant mood.

The people all fell back as the strange visitors landed.

Then down with a rush came a mammoth and richly draped palanquin, the private property of the prince.

Twenty men carried the handles of this carriage, and the three visitors rode with ease upon the silken cushions.

Through the narrow streets they were carried with haste.

The great crowd kept respectfully in the rear. For this the voyagers were extremely glad.

Soon they emerged into a plaza or mighty square. In the center of this was a huge building without walls, but supported on pillars.

Beneath the mighty roof was a dais of white marble, and upon this a great throne was raised.

A crowd of richly dressed Aztecs thronged the steps to this.

There were lines of Aztec soldiers and guards with shining shields and long lances.

Upon the throne sat Prince Hualpi himself.

The voyagers descended from the palanquin.

Then they were led up the marble steps and to the foot of the throne.

All three made a low obeisance.

Then Hualpi inclined his head and motioned them to seats at his right.

The line of guards fell back, some trumpeters began to play a strange, wild music, and then rich rugs were strewn upon the marble floor.

Out upon these there flitted a score of Aztec girls.

They were graceful in form and willowy in motion.

The dance which they executed would have done credit to the Sultan's court.

"By Jove, that is grand!" cried Gray. "What say you, Frank? This is equal to the Orient!"

"Fully," replied the young inventor.

But the words had barely left his lips when the dance was over.

Almost instantly there leaped forth a score of lithe and handsome youths.

They danced in equally as fantastic a way as the girls and then vanished. Now came a change.

Two snake charmers came on the scene.

They handled the mighty python and the deadly water adder with impunity. After them came two wrestling giants.

These were marvels of skill and strength. The Americans held their breath with interest.

Finally one of them managed to give the other a fall. He was loudly cheered and given a golden cup.

After this there was a contest with lances and with battle clubs. Then there was a blare of trumpets, the guards swung out in line and cleared the dais.

The reception was over.

Hualpi flung off his robes and came rushing down the steps of the throne.

Like a veritable school-boy he embraced his visitors. Then he plucked each by the sleeve and adjured them to follow him.

Nothing loth they complied.

Across a court from the dais they entered a more sumptuously furnished structure. This was the palace.

Upon either hand well-trained servants stood.

In the center of a richly-draped hall was a banquet table. Upon this were smoking viands.

The odor was rich and wholesome, and seated right and left of the Aztec king they did justice to as fine a meal as any of them had ever tasted.

Then a peculiar kind of wine was brought to act as a relish. After this the king arose.

"You shall see the temples of Quetzal," he said. "We are ruled by the God of Love. Quetzal is our god."

The three voyagers did not demur.

Frank and Gray had keenly enjoyed themselves, and regarded their host as at least a royal entertainer, even if he was a heathen.

But Harkwell's avaricious soul had not been idle. His keen, selfish gaze had wandered from one object of value to another with the sole purpose of, if possible, converting it to his own use.

"If I don't whack a fortune out of this scrape then I'm a fool!" he muttered. "It shall come!"

Leaving the banquet hall the party crossed a paved court which was alive with tinkling fountains and beautiful with tropical flowers. The air was odorous and sweet.

They passed through this and came to a door between high pillars. Here in a niche was a gigantic statue. It was an idol.

Hualpi knelt and kissed its inanimate foot, murmuring a brief prayer.

Then he threw open the door.

The voyagers gave a mighty start as a hot blast of air smote their faces.

They saw an inner paved court. In the center of this was an aperture, and from the depths there shot up a column of flame.

"This is the eternal fire of Quetzal," explained Hualpi. "So long as this is kept burning so will our people hold his love."

For beneath the pavement the voyagers now saw what looked like a legion of blackened imps casting wood and coal upon the eternal fire.

"Humph!" muttered Harkwell. "What eternal, superstitious fools these people are."

Hualpi led them from the court of Eternal Fire through a long passage which led into a mighty high-roofed structure.

This was the temple.

A long and heavy curtain of a stuff like silk, was lifted and the voyagers stood in the presence of the Aztec god.

Quetzal was before them.

The mighty statue of stone which reared its ugly form before them typified the deity of the Matlatlans.

About the idol's neck was a ring of metal in which was set diamonds as large as pigeons' eggs.

The pedestal and the steps were of solid gold. The crown upon the head of the idol was studded with precious stones.

Upon a small dais in front of the idol was a golden pedestal. Upon this rested a glittering diamond larger than the celebrated Kohinoor. Spellbound the adventurers gazed upon this wonderful spectacle.

"Whew!" explained Gray, "there are millions represented here, Frank!"

"An immense amount of wealth certainly," agreed the young inventor.

Harkwell, however, had different purposes uppermost in his scheming brain.

CHAPTER VII.

BARNEY AND POMP HAVE SOME FUN.

THE Aztec monarch now led his visitors from the temple and across another court.

As they were walking along here, just to their right reared the walls of a mighty building.

This suddenly became alive with white robed forms at every window and upon the roof.

The strange and dismal sound of a tocsin was heard, and then from each corner of the temple fires of worship blazed up to the heavens.

Instantly the monarch fell upon his knees and murmured a prayer.

Gray interpreted his next speech as an explanation that this was the daily feast of the Quetzal.

The voyagers were somewhat glad to be led back to the royal palace. Here more wine was supped.

Then all three embraced their royal host, and signified their desire to return to the boat.

It was growing dark, and all felt the necessity for this. They had been royally entertained.

An escort was furnished them, and they returned to the quay.

Here they found things in somewhat of a lively state on board the Nautilus.

Barney and Pomp had taken advantage of Frank's absence to have an old-time ruction.

The Celt had long had it in for the darcy, and his quick wit was not long in devising a plan for giving his friend a lively rub.

It was seldom that Barney ventured into Pomp's domains, i. e., the cooking galley.

There was always plenty of hot water, or hot hasty pudding, or something of the kind, which the darcy could depend upon for a repelling force.

So Barney never went thither.

But upon the present day, owing to a good opportunity, he decided to vary matters a little.

Pomp was somewhat fatigued with excessive work and coming out on deck said:

"I say, I'sh, I'se clare gone tiahed out. Dar amn't no need ob mah keepin' guard so I jes' gwine to turn in an' git a bit ob sleep. If yo' wants me fer anyting yo' kin call me."

"All right, naygur," replied Barney. "May yez have ilegant drames."

Then the Celt snickered in his sleeve as a brilliant idea crossed his brain.

"Begorra, if I don't mix things up in that pantry then me name ain't Barney O'Shea," he muttered.

Pomp went below to his stateroom.

Of course he closed the door behind him and locked it.

"I don't know fo' suah but dat trickster ob an l'ishman mought cum down hyar. I done flink I lock de do' jes' de same."

This was a wise precaution.

But Barney's lay was something quite altogether different.

Barney waited until he could hear Pomp's snore even at that distance. Then he acted.

Down into the galley he crept.

It was a remarkably neat and orderly place.

Pomp always kept things in apple-pie order. Barney proceeded to change this.

He placed the labels on the spice cans in opposite places. On the pepper can he put saleratus, on the mustard can he put the label red pepper, and so on through the whole list.

Then after tipping things all upside down and making things all askew, he proceeded to lay out a nice little surprise.

In the after saloon there was a small electric fan, such as is sometimes suspended over a table to dispel flies in hot weather.

Barney procured this and a long coil of electric wire.

The fan he adjusted in the flour barrel in such a way that by turning on the current it would literally tear things all to pieces on the interior of the barrel and throw the flour in a cloud high in the air.

Chuckling thus Barney left the place and went leisurely on deck, laying the wire along in out of sight places and carrying the electric key in his hand.

When, an hour later, after a good nap, Pomp came out of his stateroom and up on deck there was Barney by the rail, as innocent as you please.

"Huh!" reflected the darcy. "It am powerful queer he didn't jes' try fo' to wo'k a snap on me. Guess he am toining down a bit. Reckon it be a good time fo' me to try it on him!"

But at the moment the darcy could think of no good thing to work.

"Hab yo' heard frum Marse Frank yit, I'sh?" he asked.

"I have not, naygur!" replied Barney, "but I'm afther thinkin' he'll be coming soon an' thin it's some hot supper he'll be wantin'!"

This was a pretty broad hint, but Pomp was unsuspicious.

"Don' yo' fret about dat, chile!" he retorted. "I reckon dis yer coon hab got his eyes open an' jes' knows wha' he am up to!"

"Begorra I'm glad av that!" chuckled the Celt. "It's not ivery man I iver knew cud say sich a ting!"

"Did it eber dawn upon yo' intelligence dat yo' amn't de man s'posed fo' to know eberyting?"

"Divil a bit!" retorted Barney, "but I know something yez don't an' wud give yer old shoes ter find out!"

"Sub'l yo' can't git mah curiosity aroused one lilly bit, sah," said Pomp, sniffing the air.

"Phwhe are yez goin'?"

"If yo' keeps yo' eye on me yo'll see, sar. If yo' don't why, den yo' won't. So long."

And down the companionway went the darcy to his work. But Barney chuckled.

"Arrah, an' he's a soft wan to worruk," he muttered. "It's too dead aisy to put up a job an' him. Niver moind, but won't I have the laugh an' him now."

Then, with the electric key held safely in his hand, Barney crept down the stairway.

He heard Pomp bustling around in the cook room at a great rate.

The Celt managed to get a little nearer where he could see the interior of the cook room.

He enjoyed the spectacle for the next few moments immensely.

Pomp took down his saleratus can and was about to dust some of it into the dough.

Then his eyes stuck out like moons.

He looked at the label and gasped:

"Fo' massy's sakes! Wha' hab I done gone an' done? Hab I jes' put red pepper into dat yer box ob saleratus by mistake?"

He shook the box again.

"Huh!" he growled, "I flink I'm gittin' to be a fool. I reckon I hain't had anyting to fuddle mah brain nuther. Dat am berry queer!"

With this he took down the pepper box.

"I s'pose I'se gwine an' put de saleratus in yer fo' pepper!" he muttered. "I change dat a'right in a lilly bit."

So he turned the pepper box upside down.

But instead of saleratus out came a lot of mustard.

There it lay upon the board. The darcy took another look at the label and then sat down heavy in the nearest chair.

"Mah sakes albe!" he gasped. "Is I gittin' fo' to be color blind? How eber did dem fings git dar? I clare fo' goodness de debbil hab bin around yer!"

And at this point it was singular that the darcy did not once suspect Barney.

The Celt was holding his sides with suppressed laughter.

He knew what was coming row. The darcy was superstitious.

Pomp placed the boxes upon the table and studied the labels. He could not understand what it all meant.

And his woolly brain could grasp only one logical supposition.

"Dar am no use talkin', dis am de wo'k ob sperrits!" he muttered. "Some ghostises hab done got in yer an' did dis fing. Ugh!"

He gave a frightened start and glanced around.

Nobody was visible, but his wool had begun to unkink just the same.

At this moment a very queer sound came from Pomp's right.

It seemed to emanate from the flour barrel, and sounded very much as if some lively object was in there and wanted to get out.

For a moment the darky's teeth chattered.

"Golly fo' glory, wha' am dat?" he gasped. "Am it de ghostises in dat ar barrel?"

The noise continued, and it occurred to Pomp that it might be a stray rat or mouse.

So he plucked up courage enough to open the cover of the barrel and peer in.

Whew!

Barney turned on the full force of the current then. The electric fan literally threw the flour to the ceiling of the galley in a cloud.

Pomp's face was plastered with it; eyes and ears, nose and mouth were filled.

"Ugh! Ouch! Golly! Sabe dis chile!" yelled the frightened darky. "De debbil hab got me fo' suah!"

Then he made a blind dash out of the place.

Barney tried to get out of the way, but he was not quite quick enough.

The darky saw him, and an instant comprehension of all burst upon him.

The Celt ran shrieking up the cabin stairs.

The darky was for a moment insane with anger.

He wiped the flour from his eyes.

Then with blood in his eyes he started up the stairs.

Across the deck they raced.

Barney tried to dodge him around the water dome. But Pomp was almost instantly upon him.

And then followed a tussle which beggars description.

The two jokers were thus having it hot and heavy when Frank and his companions arrived.

"Hi there! what's the racket?" shouted the young inventor.

Instantly the two jokers were upon their feet as lively as crickets.

The fun was over and they were ready and eager for duty.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FALLING OUT WITH THE AZTECS.

POMP soon had a hot meal ready for all, and they partook of it heartily. Then in the cabin the incidents of the day were discussed.

Harkwell seemed to be in more than ordinarily good spirits.

"Great racket, warn't it?" he exclaimed. "What do you think of the heathens anyway, Denver?"

"I think they are a noble people for an uncivilized race!" replied Gray.

"Oh, you do, eh?"

"Certainly! Don't you, Frank?"

"Most certainly!" replied Frank.

Harkwell scowled a bit.

"Yet they are nothing to us!" he growled. "They are no benefit to civilization. They have got lots of gold, though, and we want it."

"If we can get it honestly, yes," replied Gray, coolly.

"Honestly! Well, I never!" laughed Harkwell, boisterously.

"Come now, I've made the best haul of the day I'll bet."

The others looked surprised, and Frank Reade, Jr., exclaimed:

"What do you mean, Harkwell?"

"Can't you guess? Why, confound it, I've made a big haul!"

With this Harkwell pulled from his pocket an object and laid it upon the table.

It was a diamond as large as a goose egg. It was truly a monster.

Astounded, Frank and Gray gazed at it.

"Where did you get that?" asked Gray, sternly.

"Don't you know?" growled Harkwell. "Why, it lay right in plain sight at the foot of that big idol in the temple."

Both Frank and Gray sprung up with startled cries.

"What? You stole it!"

Harkwell flushed angrily.

"Stole it!" he growled. "Well, call it that, if you will. What of that? Isn't it as good for me as for those dod-rotted heathens?"

Frank and Gray exchanged glances.

"My soul!" exclaimed Frank, "that is fatal! It is their sacred diamond, and will break our friendship with them."

"They will never trust us again!"

"It is too bad!"

Then Frank turned to Harkwell sternly and said:

"Did you realize what you were doing when you stole that diamond?"

Harkwell arose angrily.

"Don't you like it?" he asked, tartly.

"No!" replied Frank, tersely.

"Well, what are you going to do about it? What was the harm of my capturing such a fine prize?"

"It is a theft and a thief I will not have aboard my boat!"

Harkwell's gaze fell.

He knew it was of no use to try to bully Frank Reade, Jr.

The young inventor was dead in earnest and the ring of scorn in his voice was cutting.

"What's the use to be so foolish!" said Harkwell, pettishly, "I've got the diamond. Let it go at that!"

"Never!"

"What!"

"I mean just what I say. You have branded yourself in our estimation. Now you must make amends and I demand that you return that stone in the morning with an ample apology to Prince Hualpi."

Harkwell's face was black.

"You are a pretty set to go back on me in that way!" he declared. "The diamond is lawful booty. It is now in better hands."

"We will not argue that point," said Frank, "for we never would agree. There is but one thing for you to do if you would regain our esteem."

This terminated the conversation, for at that moment Barney shouted down the companionway:

"Shure, Misther Frank, there's the devil to pay over in the town! Wud yez cum up?"

Frank sprung on deck.

He heard a tremendous uproar in the direction of the town. At once he turned the search-light in that direction.

It could be seen that the quay was thronged with people.

Boats were putting out, and armed men were in them.

"Something is wrong!" exclaimed Gray. "What can it be, Frank?"

"I think I understand," said the young inventor, coolly. "They are after that diamond and they shall have it too."

Frank started the Nautilus toward the advancing boats. Soon they were all about them.

One of them, the king's pirogue, was lit up with flambeaux. Armed men were aboard, and in the bow stood a tall, erect form.

It was Hualpi.

As the Nautilus drew nearer hails were exchanged, and Gray acted as spokesman.

In the Aztec tongue he asked:

"What seeks the Prince?"

"My people are sore distraught," replied the monarch. "The sacred diamond, the Light of Quetzal, is gone. Our priests accuse you. If you have it you will do well to return it to us."

"We have it," replied Gray, "and you shall have it. It was taken by a misunderstanding."

The reply of the king was in joyful tones. It seemed as if the breach was already healed.

Harkwell gave up the jewel reluctantly. It was returned to Prince Hualpi without delay.

Then the boats all returned to the city, the excitement ceased, and the episode was at an end.

In their private stateroom, a short while later, Frank and Gray discussed the matter.

"What sort of a man is this man Harkwell?" asked Frank. "I thought he was a friend of yours."

"I have always supposed him to be honest," declared the explorer.

"This is the first evil thing I have seen."

"I don't like him."

"Nor I."

"He will bear watching."

"I fear that he is not en rapport with our plans. Let us be on the lookout for him."

But Harkwell, in his bunk, was far from giving way to sleep.

He was gritting his teeth fiercely and saying:

"Curse them! I'll get square with them yet! They don't intend to give me a chance. But there is a way which I can take. I have learned the mechanism of this boat. I will put them all out of the way and sail it home alone with a good bit of the treasure. Ha, ha! they will not thwart me!"

When morning came the sun lay peaceful upon the bosom of the inland sea.

The distant city looked picturesque and beautiful.

But none of the Aztec people came out to the Nautilus.

That day was spent in close work aboard the boat getting things into shipshape condition again.

Another night passed and another day came.

Then Frank could not help remarking the singularity of the thing.

"It is queer," he muttered. "None of the Aztecs have come out to see us. What does it mean?"

"They mean to give us the cold shoulder," said Gray. "If there is one crime high in the Aztec calendar it is theft."

"Then why didn't you let me keep the diamond?" growled Harkwell.

"You'll have trouble now anyway."

"You contemptible cur!" cried Frank Reade, Jr., angrily. "I am sorry I brought you with us. But for you this trouble would never have occurred."

Finally it was decided to make a move, so Frank said:

"Gray, let us go ashore and see Hualpi. Perhaps we can fix it all right with him."

"All right, Frank."

Accordingly a small rubber canoe of portable Rob Roy style was brought out, and in it they paddled over to the town.

As Frank and Gray landed on the quay they saw at once that there was something wrong.

The people regarded them with sullen looks and mien. Nobody was on hand to welcome them.

To say that our adventurers were vexed would be putting it mild.

"All on account of the fool work of Harkwell!" declared Gray. "I feel like throwing him overboard!"

"So do I!" declared Frank.

They went on up to the palace. They were about to accost the guard at the gate, when it opened and a palanquin came out.

Upon the showy cushions reposed the form of Hualpi.

At sight of the two white men, he appeared greatly excited. Partly leaping from his palanquin, he cried:

"If you would save your lives, go! The god Quetzal has called for your blood in atonement for sacrilege. Go! Go!"

Gray understood enough to make it clear to Frank Reade, Jr. Then he addressed Hualpi:

"Is there no reconciliation?" he asked. "Can we not atone to your priests?"

"No—no!" screamed Hualpi, "the demand of Quetzal is never refused. Go for your lives!"

"Come, Frank!" said Gray. "We'd better hustle!"

At once they started for the quay.

Their hurried attitude seemed to give the people an inkling of the truth. Their presence in the town had in some way reached the priests.

The tocsin in the temple suddenly began to sound.

It was the usual war cry of the Aztecs. No heathen dared disobey its call.

And so as soon as our two adventurers ran for the quay they heard a mob gathering behind them.

Gray realized the danger fully.

He had lived among these people and knew just what they were.

"My God! if we don't reach that wharf in time we are doomed men, Frank!" he cried.

"All right," replied the young inventor, "here goes."

Away they sped like a whirlwind.

From a street corner three or four loungers tried to stop them.

Frank knocked down two with his fists.

Through them burst the two fugitives and kept on for the quay.

And now it was close at hand.

There lay the canoe.

The next moment Gray had shoved it into the water.

Both men took up the paddles and fairly made the light craft fly.

They were in a few moments at a safe distance from the shore.

But it had been a most narrow escape all the same.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ISLAND MISSING.

THERE was no boatman among the Aztecs who could hope to overtake the Rob Roy canoe.

It reached the Nautilus and Frank and Gray climbed aboard. But the end was not yet.

A legion of boats were seen putting out from the quay.

The priests had ordered these simple people to bring back the blood of the sacrilegists for Quetzal and they could not refuse.

On they came in martial array. It was evidently their intention to attack the Nautilus.

Frank regarded the move with dismay.

"What am I to do?" he exclaimed, with deep concern. "I don't want to fight these people, neither do I want to give way to them. They evidently will not be pacified."

"I have a scheme!" exclaimed Gray, promptly.

"What is it?"

"Go down to the bottom and remain there for a day or two. There should be plenty to see down there!"

"You are right!" cried Frank. "We will explore the sunken plain. Let her sink, Barney!"

"All roight, sor!"

The Celt pressed the lever and the boat sank.

Down she went to what seemed interminable depths. She rested finally upon a bed of coral.

Frank sent the search light in every direction.

"See here!" he cried. "What does this mean? I don't see anything of your sunken towns."

Gray could not explain the situation. However, the boat remained at the bed of the island sea for that day and night.

The next morning Frank said:

"Do you suppose they are hovering about up there waiting for us to appear?"

"I doubt it!" replied Gray. "Let her go up, Frank!"

But suddenly there came a peculiar shock. The Nautilus was lifted as if by giant hands and hurled forward.

When she struck, it was full between two jagged ledges of coral. And there she stuck.

No effort of the engines could dislodge her. She seemed a hopeless prisoner.

To the others it looked as if they were in a bad scrape.

But Frank only laughed and said:

"I'll fix that all right."

He produced a pair of diving-suits. He and Barney donned these, and with suitable tools, went out into the sea.

This was accomplished by means of a vestibule which could be emptied of water on the return.

Frank and Barney worked away for hours upon the reef.

Then they suddenly freed the Nautilus and she floated off. Hastily they returned to the deck.

Entering the vestibule they closed the door behind them and put on the pneumatic pumps.

When the water was out of the vestibule they walked into the cabin. Gray met Frank.

"Well, Frank," he said, "what was that? An earthquake?"

"It sounded much like it," replied Frank.

"Shall we stay here longer?"

"No; let us go up and see what they are doing in the Aztec city."

"All right."

The Nautilus instantly sprang to the surface. Up out of the water she leaped like a duck.

All hands were in the pilot house to get a look at the Aztec town. But a thrilling surprise awaited them.

All about was the level expanse of the ocean.

No land was in sight. The Aztec island, Matatlan, all had vanished as if they were of mist.

Astounded, the crew of the Nautilus looked in vain for the island.

It was certainly missing.

For some time nobody was able to speak.

Then Pomp broke the spell.

"Golly fo' glory!" he gasped. "Wha'ebber hab become ob dat island?"

"That is the question," said Gray. "Where is it?"

"Missing!" exclaimed Harkwell.

"Yes, but—could it have sunk into the ocean?"

Frank Reade, Jr.'s eyes flashed, and he said:

"Do you recall that earthquake shock while we were under the water?"

"Yes."

"No doubt it was at that moment the island sank into the sea."

"In that case Matatlan and all its inhabitant are no more!"

"Even so!"

A spell of silence succeeded. All strained their gaze across the wide expanse of water.

"It is very queer!" declared Frank. "And altogether terrible if true!"

"It must be true!" said Gray. "The island has not floated away into the air."

"Of course not."

"Ought we not to ascertain the fate of the Aztecs beyond a doubt?"

"Yes."

Frank went into the pilot-house and started the Nautilus forward. The boat glided away.

The young inventor located what he believed was the exact spot where Matatlan had been.

Then he brought the submarine boat to a stop here and opened the tank valve.

The boat settled in the water and went gliding down beneath the waves.

The voyagers were all agog with interest, for they expected every moment to behold a tragic scene below them.

It would not have been a surprise to have seen the Aztec city and its drowned inhabitants spread before them in terrible tragic forms.

But nothing of the sort was seen.

To the amazement of all only a wide plain of white sand devoid of any submarine growth whatever.

The Nautilus descended and rested upon this.

Frank flashed the search-light in all directions. Nothing further was seen than this.

To say that the explorers were astonished would be a mild statement.

Frank Reade, Jr., was puzzled.

"I don't understand this," he declared. "Certainly there was an island upon this spot. Where is it now?"

Certainly it was not above or under the water apparently. For aught they could know this plain of white sand had been the bed of the ocean for centuries or more.

Here was certainly a deep sea mystery.

"Perhaps we have drifted away from the exact location of the island!" suggested Gray; "the shock of the earthquake changed our position not a little."

"There is such a possibility," declared Frank. "We will test it."

With which he sent the Nautilus forward rapidly through the water.

For some ways the submarine boat ran on thus.

But yet the general character of the ocean's bed seemed unchanged. However, the verge of the sandy plain was reached.

It was succeeded by a slimy, muddy bottom alive with submarine life, and in keeping with the general character of the ocean's bed.

But there was nothing suggestive of a sunken island.

Indeed, now that the voyagers looked back upon it all seemed like a strange dream.

The past seemed strangely unreal. The Aztec city, the inland bay, all had vanished as if by magic.

They were transported in a few hours to what seemed certainly an entirely different part of the world.

What did it mean?

What was the mystery?

Suddenly, as they were gliding along over the ocean bed, Barney gave a startled cry.

"Whurroo, Mither Frank," he cried; "phwat the divil is that ahead av us?"

The searchlight had now revealed a most astounding spectacle.

Directly before them was a rocky cliff, and upon it was a patch of forest, the trees looking as natural as if above the sea.

"A submarine forest!" cried Gray, excitedly. "Hurrah, Frank! We've found the island!"

And indeed so it seemed.

But as they drew nearer the white plain of sand was seen beyond. The forest thus submerged must have been only a part of a small island, if it had ever been above the level of the sea, which was, of course, likely, as the trees were not apparent submarine growth.

So closely set were the trees that of course it was not safe for the Nautilus to enter the forest.

And indeed this would not have been thought of but for Harkwell.

He gave a startled cry, and pointing into the depths, said:

"See! What brilliant object is that glistening in there? It is a golden idol perhaps studded with diamonds."

The search-light certainly struck some object which emitted a powerful and dazzling light.

At once all were interested.

It was quickly decided to explore the forest.

But how could this be done? Frank quickly decided the problem.

The Nautilus rose above the forest for a number of feet and there rested just above the treetops.

Then Frank brought out the diving suits, three in number. He selected Barney as one companion and would have picked Gray for the next.

But Harkwell demurred.

"That is hardly fair," he declared. "I insist upon a chance. Gray went with you last time. It is my turn now."

"Very well," said Gray, "let us decide the matter by tossing a coin."

Harkwell agreed to this.

The coin was tossed and Harkwell won the chance. He was triumphant.

Frank was not altogether pleased, but he said nothing.

The diving suits were donned, and they entered the vestibule.

The long rope ladders were lowered.

Barney led the way down, and Harkwell went next, Frank being last.

Pomp and Gray kept the air pumps going on board the Nautilus.

In a few moments all three divers stood upon the bed of the ocean under the overhanging trees of the forest.

Frank and Barney carried lanterns with an air pipe connecting with their helmets so that the flame would be fed with oxygen. Thus they were all ready for action.

CHAPTER X.

A MURDERER FOILED.

For some moments the three divers hesitated as to what move to make.

They could not make each other hear a word of conversation, unless the helmets were placed closely together.

Then Barney took a course among the trees, and for a moment went out of sight.

Harkwell remained by Frank, who took an opposite course.

As the life lines were not of extreme length, it was not possible to go a great ways.

There was also extreme danger of their becoming entangled in the branches of the trees. So Frank proceeded with great caution.

Yet he was able to make some fifty yards into the submarine forest, when he saw a gleam of something bright just before him.

He pressed forward, and suddenly came upon a thrilling sight.

Between two trees there was stretched a hammock, and in this reclined the form of an Aztec.

The heathen's glazed eyes were staring straight forward with terrible intensity, showing that he had awakened from his sleep too late to arise and ward off the awful death which had so suddenly come upon him.

Upon his breast was a huge circular shield of polished metal, which gleamed intensely in the lantern light, and was so bright that Frank could see his own image.

Indeed, he saw now that the center of the shield was a glass mirror, no doubt intended by the wearer to dazzle a foe.

All manner of submarine creatures, slimy eels, horrid crabs, and shark like fish swam about the body. Frank was spellbound.

Just beyond he saw the walls of a house.

He understood all now.

This was no doubt a part of the sunken island, and the Aztec victim had been asleep in the hammock when the waters overwhelmed him.

All this Frank took in readily, and was about to turn to his companion Harkwell, who stood behind him, when he chanced to glance again into the mirror.

The sight which he saw in the mirror was one which for the moment nearly froze the blood in his veins.

Harkwell stood behind him with one hand upraised, a knife in his grasp and just about to sever Frank's life line.

It was murder pure and simple that he intended. The young inventor realized this.

And for a moment he was powerless to act. There was but an instant of time left.

Then with an instant spasmodic impulse Frank jerked his head forward and the life line flew up.

The knife missed the mark, and the next instant Frank was facing his would-be assassin.

Harkwell started back and the knife dropped from his fingers.

Frank made a motion and pulled the signal cord.

Instantly he and Harkwell were lifted from the bed of the ocean.

Up they went and a moment later were upon the deck of the Nautilus. Frank opened the vestibule and motioned Harkwell to enter.

Not until they were in the cabin and their helmets removed could either speak.

Then Frank faced his would-be murderer with white, stern face.

"Richard Harkwell!" he said, rigidly. "What have you to say for yourself?"

The latter feigned surprise.

"I don't know what you mean?" he replied, coolly.

Frank trembled like an aspen his rage was so great. At this moment Barney also returned aboard.

Gray and Pomp regarded the two angry men with amazement. They speedily understood what it meant, though.

"Don't you tell me that!" said Frank, sternly, "I saw what you were up to. You tried to cut my life line. I saw you. You miserable cur, you intended to murder me!"

The wretch feigned surprise still.

"It is false!" he retorted. "I did not know it was your life line!"

Frank was astounded!

"You did not know it?" he gasped.

"No. How should I? I thought it was the branch of a tree that was in the way."

With unparalleled hardihood the villain made this announcement.

Frank regarded him sternly.

"You dare to make that statement?"

"It is the truth."

"It is a lie!"

"Well, have it so, then."

"You meant to kill me. What did you expect to gain?"

"Why, there's the idea," retorted the villain with rare hardihood. "What had I to gain? I had no object in killing you. That in itself is evidence of my innocence."

"Why, this is horrible!" exclaimed Gray with white face. "Is there any truth in what I hear, Frank?"

"It is true if my eyesight is to be believed," declared the young inventor. "I saw the wretch try to cut my life line!"

Gray turned upon Harkwell.

"What does this mean?" he declared, angrily. "It will not do for you to try any villainous game aboard this boat, Dick Harkwell. I am responsible for your presence here!"

Harkwell's eyes gleamed luridly.

"Every one of you is working against me!" he declared. "I had a fortune in my grasp and you robbed me of it. I am sick of this job, and you can take me home as quickly as possible."

"Take you home!" exclaimed Gray, angrily, "if you attempt any more dirty games we will pitch you overboard. It rests with Mr. Reade whether you have your personal liberty again during this voyage or not."

Frank shrugged his shoulders.

"I do not wish to deprive him," he said, "but he must certainly adopt a different course!"

Harkwell saw plainly that his mask was off.

He slunk away to his state-room and did not come out to dinner. His black soul seethed with revenge.

"Frank, I am sorry," said Gray; "if I had suspected his true character I would never have brought him along."

"That is no fault of yours," said Frank, "but I do think he is a dangerous character and needs watching."

"I will look out for that. I think it would be best to get rid of him as soon as possible."

"We will do so. We will either put him ashore or aboard some home bound vessel."

And so the matter ended.

But Harkwell no longer rejoiced in an opportunity. All now understood his game thoroughly.

The Nautilus left the submarine forest and the drowned Aztec warrior behind.

Once more search was begun for the missing island.

For two days the submarine cruise was continued, and then Frank said to Gray:

"What shall we do? Shall we give it up?"

Gray's face fell.

"I am much disappointed," he said. "It is all very strange."

"And yet the island seems to have entirely vanished. Is it not futile to continue the search?"

"It would seem so. But what can have become of the island?"

"I have a theory!"

"What is it?"

Frank was silent a moment, then he said:

"We found in that locality where we believed we had left the island nothing but a mighty plain of sand."

"Yes!"

"Well now, do you know I believe I can understand the disappearance of Matatlan. It is under that ocean of sand!"

"Under the sand?"

"Yes!"

"But—"

"Simple enough. The whole island may have become engulfed in a vast bed of quicksand. The natural props which supported it were destroyed by the earthquake and it sank."

"Do you believe that?"

"Is it not possible?"

"Certainly, but—"

"What?"

"Humph!" exclaimed Gray, dejectedly. "We can never dig Matatlan out of that bed of sand."

"We will not try. I suggest that we turn our thoughts to some other plan."

"I shall do just as you think best, Frank."

The young inventor was thoughtful. He went into the cabin and became plunged in a reverie.

He did not believe himself in the sinking of Matatlan beneath the quicksand. Yet what was he to believe?

Suddenly, as if by magic, a strange thought flitted across his mind. "Queer that I did not think of that before!" he muttered. With which he arose and went into the pilot-house. He touched an electric key and the Nautilus began to rise. Up it went until it was upon the surface.

Leaping out of the water through a cloud of spray, the bright sunlight gleamed upon her shining hull.

About was the vast expanse of rolling sea.

No land was in sight so far. Certainly not the Aztec Islands.

Gray came rushing forward, as did Barney and Pomp.

"What's up, Frank?" cried the explorer. "What is the new scheme?"

"Wait a bit," said Frank quietly.

The young inventor opened the door and stepped out upon deck.

He noted the altitude of the sun and the points of the compass.

Then he went into the cabin.

When he came out he brought a number of nautical instruments.

Then the others understood his purpose.

Like him, they wondered why this had not been done before.

"Going to take your bearings, eh, Frank?" asked Gray.

"Yes," replied the young inventor. "Is it not a good idea?"

"Capital!"

"And about time also."

"You are right."

Frank proceeded to make his calculations.

The others stood by watching with interest.

And as the young inventor concluded, they saw an expression of amazement upon his face.

"Well, I never!" he exclaimed. "That does beat all!"

CHAPTER XI.

A VISIT TO THE TEMPLE.

GRAY was startled.

"What is wrong, Frank?" he asked. "Are we out of the way?"

"I should say so!" replied the young inventor. "How far do you suppose we are from the locality of the Aztec Islands at this moment?"

"Not very far."

"One hundred and fifty miles!"

All looked stupefied.

This was an astounding declaration.

"One hundred and fifty miles!" gasped Gray. "Impossible!"

"I have made a careful reckoning."

"There is a mistake!"

"No!"

Frank spoke positively. Gray looked at him, and said:

"How do you explain it?"

The young inventor passed a hand across his brow.

"It beats all!" he exclaimed. "I should say there was witchery about it. We were in the atol of Matatlan. Without any warning we are transported one hundred and fifty miles away!"

"Yet we have had plenty of time to drift from that point at least that distance."

"To drift!" exclaimed Frank, suddenly. "That gives me an idea!"

He paced the deck for some moments, and then said to Barney:

"Set your course northeast. Crowd on all speed! We ought to make that hundred and fifty miles in four hours."

"We will, sir!" declared the Celt.

Away shot the submarine boat to the northward.

For hours she traveled rapidly.

All this while Frank paced the deck in front of the pilot house with a glass in his hand.

But toward nightfall a dense fog came down. It was necessary to proceed slowly.

The search-light could make no impression on the fog.

When morning came it seemed denser than ever.

But the sun soon lifted it, and as it rolled upward an astounded cry burst from the lips of all.

There, directly in front of them, was an island.

It was of the same type as Matatlan. There were palm groves and cliffs of basalt.

But it was not Matatlan.

As the fog continued to lift other islands were seen. There was no disputing the fact, the Aztec Isles had been rediscovered.

But this did not explain the mystery of their having drifted so far from Matatlan.

How had they drifted out of the inland sea and without knowing it? Here was a conundrum.

But all eyes were busy looking for Matatlan.

It was not to be seen.

There were the adjacent islands, but the Aztec island certainly was still missing. Here was a puzzle.

"What do you make of it, Frank?" asked Gray.

The young inventor shook his head dubiously.

"I don't know," he replied, "but I am going to make a desperate effort to solve the mystery."

"I hope you will succeed. May I ask your plan?"

"Well, first of all, I am going to ascertain if Matatlan has really gone to the bottom of the sea or not."

"Good!"

"If so, then we will continue our submarine exploration. It seems as if we ought to be successful!"

"I think so."

At this moment Pomp called Frank to the rail.

"Golly, Marse Frank!" he cried. "Wha' ebber yo' call dat? Don't it look like a boat, sah?"

"It is a boat!" cried Frank, excitedly.

From a cove in one of the tropical isles a boat had come forth. It contained several occupants.

Of course the crew of the Nautilus were interested.

"They are Aztecs!" cried Gray, with conviction. "Perhaps we can learn from them the particulars of the fate of the isle now missing."

"Let them approach us!" said Frank. "You hail them, Gray!"

"I will do so, Frank!"

The Aztec boat now drew rapidly nearer. It was plain that the occupants had seen the Nautilus from the shore and were putting out to hail it.

Six in all were in the Aztec boat.

They were strong, armed warriors, and advanced to within hailing distance of the Nautilus.

Gray answered their hail and interpreting their words, said:

"They are survivors; now we shall get the whole story!"

The pirogue drew nearer and Gray talked for some time with the natives. Frank brought out some food and gave it to them.

Their story as rendered by Gray was a pitiful one.

The Isle of Matatlan had without warning sunk into the water.

Nearly all of the nation had perished in that awful catastrophe. They had been hunting upon an adjacent island and thus were saved.

It was altogether a most tragic and thrilling account.

"Then Hualpi and all his people are at the bottom of the sea, drowned?" said Frank, with horror. "That is something awful."

"Awful indeed!" rejoined Gray.

"Fools!"

The hissing exclamation came from their rear.

Astonished, both wheeled and faced Harkwell.

The villain's eyes blazed.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Frank sharply.

"I mean that you have been fools. All that treasure might have been yours. The sea has it now!"

"Better let the sea have it than to gain it by robbery or murder," replied Frank.

"Bah! you are too soft!"

And Harkwell turned away in supreme disgust.

But neither Frank nor Gray heeded this.

There were but a few survivors of the awful flood, and they were huddled upon the nearest isle.

"Ask them what they intend to do?" said Frank. "They certainly ought to be cared for in some way."

Gray did so.

"They affirm their intention of joining quite a large colony upon an island further north," replied Gray. "I think they are all right."

"Enough then," said Frank, "let us take our submarine tour of exploration now!"

"And visit the sunken Matatlan?"

"Yes."

Frank and Gray watched the Aztec boat recede to the shore. Then the Nautilus was headed for that point on the surface of the sea where the island had been.

Arrived at what was believed to be the point, Frank said:

"Let the boat go down!"

All retreated into the cabin. Barney pressed the lever back, and down went the Nautilus.

The voyagers had expected to sink some distance, but suddenly there was a shock, and the Nautilus was motionless.

They had not descended twenty feet as yet. The boat had struck bottom.

"Where are we?" cried Frank, in surprise. "We cannot possibly have reached the island yet?"

"We have, sir!" replied Barney, as he flashed the search-light about, "but it's on the top of the big mountain we are."

This was comprehensive enough.

The mountain which rose back of Matatlan was within twenty feet of the surface.

The sunken city was then some thousands of feet below.

The Nautilus was raised, and sailed along until at a point where it was easy for her to descend the mountain slope.

Then the search-light was sent down into the dark valley below, and there was revealed the City of Matatlan in all its grandeur.

But it was silent and echoless. It would never again teem with life and spirit.

Its erstwhile builders and dwellers were corpses in its streets and its buildings of stone.

They would never again walk the earth and play in the great drama of life, which has so dark a curtain to end all.

It was a thrilling reflection for the voyagers.

They gazed at the sunken city silently for some time. There was little hesitation about descending.

But Frank finally said:

"Let her slide down, Barney. I think we will visit the Aztec temple. If there is anything of great value we can recover we ought to do so."

"All right, sir!"

So the Nautilus settled down until it rested in the great square of the Aztec city and near to the temple of Quetzal.

The search-light was turned full upon it.

A dreadful sight it was which was revealed.

There upon the wall, upon the marble steps, and in the great portico were heaps of drowned people.

Some of the bodies had begun to rise and float about. It was a ghastly, hideous sight.

At first Frank hesitated in paying a visit to such a grewsome spot. But he thought of the great treasure in the temple and felt a natural desire to recover it.

"Of course we ought to do it," said Gray, "the treasure can be of no possible use to these people now!"

So Frank ordered Barney to bring up the diving-suits and they were put on.

It is needless to say that Harkwell was not this time invited to accompany them.

The diving snits now used by Frank were of a different pattern. They were an invention of his own and he declared:

"I will try these and see if they are as great a success as I hope. If so they are much superior to the old style."

"What is the difference?" asked Gray.

Frank proceeded to illustrate the advantages of the new suit. It was speedily seen that they were many.

Instead of the old style and cumbersome life line and air-pump there was a chemical generator and reservoir for manufacturing the air consumed by the diver.

The special advantage was that the diver was not hampered or restricted by a life line.

CHAPTER XII.

RECOVERY OF THE DIAMONDS.

The new style of diving suit bid fair to be a great success. Frank was the first to test its efficacy.

Putting it on he ventured out on deck.

The air generator worked admirably and he experienced no inconvenience whatever. He signaled to Barney and Gray to join him.

It was thus arranged that Pomp and Harkwell should remain aboard the Nautilus.

Leaving the deck of the submarine boat the three divers easily crossed the intervening distance to the temple.

They wore electric lamps upon their helmets which enabled them to see their way quite clearly.

Frank ascended the steps of the temple and entered.

The others followed.

The Nautilus now passed from view, consequently they were dependent wholly upon the lights in their helmets.

In the inner court of the temple the scene beheld by the divers was most tragic.

There were heaps upon heaps of dead people, just where the tidal wave had overtaken them.

Truly the sight was one to harrow up the soul.

But Frank led the way through various passages. He was looking for the golden idol.

As near as he could remember, he followed the course which had been pursued by Hualpi, when he had gone thither with him.

And soon he found the inner court with the heavy draperies. He parted these, and there was the idol.

His companions were now by his side, and the combined glare of the electric lamps lit up the place quite well.

Gray put his helmet close to Frank's, and shouted:

"Upon my soul, it is wonderful, is it not?"

"You are right," replied Frank.

"There must be the value of millions in the idol's crown."

"Certainly."

The monster diamonds glittered with dazzling brightness despite the muddy hue of the water.

The explorers now began to gather the treasures they had come for.

Upon the golden pedestal yet rested the magnificent diamond which Harkwell had stolen.

Frank removed this and placed it safely in the bag which he carried. He took the pedestal as well.

This represented a large fortune in itself, but there was ten times more to take yet.

Without any delay further than was necessary, the explorers hastily removed the other diamonds.

Barney climbed to the shoulders of the god Quetzal and removed the diamond studded crown.

Then Gray placed his helmet close beside Frank's and shouted:

"Have we got enough?"

"I think so."

"Of course there must be much more."

"Oh, yes, the treasure vaults of the king are full of wealth. But I hardly think we can carry it all away."

"Then we had better return to the Nautilus?"

"First I would like, if possible, to learn the fate of Hualpi."

"All right. Then we will have to look through the palace?"

"Yes."

"Very well; you may lead the way."

Frank had no slight feelings of curiosity to know whether Hualpi had met his death by drowning or not.

So he led the way, and for some time an ineffectual search was made through the temple and palace.

All this while the chemical generators did not fail to furnish plenty of good pure air. The divers were progressing with remarkable success.

Many dead bodies of priests and nobles were found and examined; but the ruler, Hualpi, could not be found.

"That is very queer," muttered Frank, and a wild, joyous thought crossed his breast.

"Perhaps he is yet alive," he reflected. "He may have escaped the tidal wave and yet be above the surface."

There were truly many ways in which Hualpi could have escaped the earthquake shock and the tidal wave.

He might have been out in his pirogue, which was not at all unlikely, and when the shock came have escaped to some neighboring isle.

With this thrill of joyful hope, Frank now decided to return to the Nautilus. He made a sign to Gray.

The latter came near and placed his helmet close to Frank's.

"I think we had better return to the Nautilus!" said Frank.

"All right!"

Barney was signaled and they at once set forth upon the return.

In a few moments they had reached the steps of the temple, and were looking for the electric glare of the search light.

But it was not there.

Astonished Frank started across the square. He reached the spot where the Nautilus had been left.

It was gone.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE END.

THE awful horror of that reflection can hardly be conveyed in words.

"Gone!" gasped Frank. "My God, what has happened?"

Gray placed his helmet close to Frank's and shouted:

"What can have happened? Would Pomp desert us?"

"Never!" replied the young inventor. "Something terrible has happened. I do not understand it."

Then like a wave the conviction of truth came sweeping over him. He clutched Gray's arm and cried:

"My God, I think I understand all now!"

"How?"

"That villain Harkwell. We should not have left him alone with Pomp. He has no doubt overpowered him, and this is the end."

"My God! then we are left here to die!"

"Yes, the moment our chemical generators give out we are doomed!"

It was an appalling reflection; there was not a vestige of doubt in the hearts of the explorers that this was the case.

Each sank down upon the pavements of the plaza.

What was to be done? They were apparently doomed; what could be done but to resign themselves to fate?

After some time, however, Frank sprang to his feet.

He motioned to the others and they put their helmets together; then he said:

"There is no use in our giving up hope at this stage. We must do something. Let us try at least to gain one of the other islands."

"But can we hope to do that?" asked Gray. "Will the chemical air last long enough?"

"I see no reason why if we set our course right," said Frank; "fortunately I have a compass."

"That is good!"

"If I remember right the nearest island was in a northwest course from here."

"Yes!"

"Begorra, sor!" exclaimed Barney, wildly, "I thought I saw the light at the Nautilus! Beme sowl it is!"

The three divers started up with wild delight and hope.

Barney's premise had proved correct.

A bright light like that of the sun was shining across the face of the temple. Already the clear cut form of the Nautilus was seen coming down upon them through the gloom.

"Hurrah!" cried Frank, wildly. "Pomp is coming back to save us!"

Down came the Nautilus, and at one of the windows Pomp's face was seen. The darky was eagerly looking for them.

It is needless to say that they were but a very few moments in getting aboard the Nautilus.

Once in the cabin, explanations were quickly made.

Pomp was frightfully cut and bleeding, but he pointed to the door of Harkwell's state-room, and said:

"I jes had a powerful hard scrap wif him, Marse Frank, but I jes done him up, jes de same!"

"What, did you kill him?" asked Gray, bluntly.

"No, sah, but I had to hurt him some in binding him, sah. He am tied up hand and foot."

"Then he attacked you?" asked Frank.

"Yes, sir, he did dat."

And Pomp forthwith explained the whole affair to which the others listened with interest.

It seemed that unsuspecting anything Pomp was at work in the galley preparing a meal.

Suddenly and without any warning the door was closed and barred. He knew at once that Harkwell was up to a desperate game.

The villain then rushed into the pilot-house and sent the boat to the surface.

Pomp seized an ax and began to batter down the door. When he

emerged from the galley finally, Harkwell sprang upon him with a huge knife.

He meant to kill the darky, but the latter fought so valiantly that he actually overpowered him, though in doing so he got frightfully cut.

"But I jes' laid him out!" declared the plucky negro; "he didn't git de bes' ob me yo' kin bet."

"And we are safe once more," declared Frank. "We will keep Mr. Harkwell where he is until we reach home and then we will turn him over to the law."

"Dat am de way to do it, sah."

The general joy of the voyagers that the affair was no worse was great. Mutual congratulations were indulged in.

Then it was made sure that Harkwell was a safe prisoner. Frank stepped into the pilot house and said:

"Here goes. We will leave this part of the world to-day. I have seen enough of tragedy."

"So have I," said Gray.

Frank pressed the spring and the Nautilus sprang to the surface. The young inventor, however, had yet a move to make ere leaving these waters.

This was to it possible learn if Hualpi survived the awful disaster. He had taken an intense liking to the chivalrons and noble young Aztec chief and king.

"I shall feel glad indeed to know that he was spared!"

"Let us hope that he was," said Gray.

Course was at once set for the nearest of the remaining Aztec Isles. As the Nautilus drew near the shore a fire was seen far up on a high cliff.

"It looks like one of the fires of worship!" said Frank. "I hope that we can learn good news from there!"

The Nautilus dropped anchor in the cove and a portable boat was got out. Frank and Gray rowed ashore.

They had barely stepped out on the beach, however, when a startling thing happened.

A wild cry reached their ears and from the cover of the shore several men sprang down upon the beach.

They were Aztecs.

And the foremost one was well-known to them. It was no other than the young Aztec king Hualpi.

In an instant he was at Frank's side and embracing him as well as Gray.

He was so overcome with joy that it was some moments before intelligible utterances could be got from him.

Then a fearful wave of sadness swept over his face.

He swept his hand toward the sea, saying dejectedly:

"All that I loved—all I had to live for—is gone! Hualpi is wretched indeed! Quetzal has forgotten!"

"Do not say that," replied Gray. "You have your life. Some of your people have survived. There are others upon an island above here. Found a new kingdom."

Hualpi shook his head sadly.

"No," he said, "the sun of the Aztec has set. It is the last."

It was decided by Frank and Gray to return to the king those sacred relics which they taken from the idol.

Hualpi received them joyfully.

Then came a parting embrace, and the two adventurers returned to the deck of the Nautilus.

"Well," said Gray, a while later, "we might have kept all that wealth, Frank. But it was not ours."

"We had no right to it."

"Certainly not; and we shall feel better for restoring it. Now let us go home."

Homeward bound they were now.

The Nautilus started upon her southward course. The great trip was at an end.

They had accomplished really the object which had brought them to this part of the world, and that was the discovery of the Aztec kingdom.

Adventure and excitement galore had been theirs. It was a surfeit and they were satisfied.

In due time Rendestown was safely reached.

Harkwell was suffered to go free upon a promise for better things. He was never after seen by any of the party.

Gray went back to New York. He meditates a trip to Central Africa next.

Frank Reade, Jr., began work on a new invention. Barney and Pomp are in their old places, and this will bring our story to its close.

[THE END.]

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